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ABSTRACT

Noting that primary prevention of contagious diseases includes teaching young children and their caregivers about personal hygiene behavior, this paper presents a lesson for teaching handwashing to young children in preschool and early elementary grades using a variety of fun and low-cost techniques. The learning objectives for the lesson are that students will: identify the five most important times to wash their hands, demonstrate proper handwashing technique, and practice washing their hands correctly at appropriate times during the school day. Materials for the lesson are presented. Methods for the lesson include singing songs, playing games, completing activity sheets, and using guided practice. Assessment criteria are also described. (KB)

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Fun with Handwashing Education

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Fun with Handwashing Education

Abstract

Primary prevention of contagious diseases includes teaching young children and their caregivers about personal hygiene behaviors. There are five key times to wash hands with soap and water: *before* eating, *after* sneezing or coughing, *after* playing outdoors, *after* playing with pets, and *after* using the toilet. This lesson presents a variety of fun and low-cost techniques for handwashing education.

Introduction

Handwashing is one of the most important components of infection control in early childhood education programs (Squibb & Yardley, 1999). Other components include use of a disinfectant on all contact surfaces, use of disposable towels, regular washing of toys, sanitary disposal of diapers, safe handling and storage of foodstuffs, and sanitizing eating utensils. Finnish researchers included many of these components in a randomized controlled study of infection control in 20 child day-care centers. Results revealed a nine percent reduction in infections among three year-olds; visits to doctors for acute ear infections were reduced by an impressive 27% (Uhari & Mottonen, 1999).

Teaching children proper handwashing technique is an important part of personal health and hygiene education. The risk of infectious disease can be reduced.

This teaching strategy was designed for students in

preschool and early elementary grades. Students learn about handwashing by singing songs, playing games, completing activity sheets, and through guided practice. This lesson has been taught to children in 10 different preschools and one elementary school in two Alabama counties in the United States.

Objectives

The general learning objectives for early elementary students are compatible with National Health Education Standards One and Three (Joint Commission on Health Education Standards, 1995). The first National Standard is "students will comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention." Standard #3 is "students will demonstrate the ability to practice health-enhancing behaviors and reduce health risks."

There are three specific learning objectives for this lesson:

1. Students will identify the five most important times to wash their hands: *after* using the toilet, *after* playing outside, *after* playing with pets, *after* coughing or sneezing, and *before* eating.
2. Each student will demonstrate proper technique for washing hands.
3. Students will practice washing their hands correctly at appropriate times during the school day.

Materials

National Health Education Standards (JCNHES, 1995); photographs, doll, or other illustrations of sick children (e.g., *Staying Clean and Healthy: Creative Activities for Teaching Basic Personal Hygiene Habits*, Spence, 1995); glitter; drawings,

photographs, or slides of common pathogenic organisms; colored construction paper; classroom set of stencils; paint, markers, crayons, and novelty stickers; stapler and glue; model storybook of hygiene behaviors; bulletin boards; facial tissues; sink and water; liquid soap; paper towels; letter to parents; large-format poster to record students' healthy habits (optional); wallpaper samples (optional); *Hooray for Handwashing: A Program for Early Childhood Settings* (Soap and Detergent Association, 1990) (optional).

Method

Use photographs, line drawings, cartoons, or a doll to illustrate a sick child. Ask students to describe how children can become sick. *Staying Clean and Healthy: Creative Activities for Teaching Basic Personal Hygiene Habits* is a good source of teacher duplication masters and activity sheets for elementary students (Spence, 1995).

Define the word germ. Germs are very small bacteria, viruses, or fungi. Germs can make you feel sick. Ask students to describe common symptoms of illness, for instance, feeling tired and achy, hot temperature, upset stomach, loss of appetite. An optional activity for older children is to show line drawings, photographs, or slides of common pathogenic organisms, e.g., salmonella, a cold virus (Meredith, Needham, & Unwin, 1993).

Ask students to discuss how we encounter germs. Sample behaviors for discussion include playing outdoors, handling pets, and sharing toys. Describe how your body usually fights germs off with your skin and respiratory system. Sometimes you

become ill.

Illustrate common methods of germ transmission, i.e., sneezing or coughing on a person or object, and touching hands of another person, touching toys or play surfaces, food, and a toilet. Invite students to draw a picture of a germ as they imagine it to be.

Sprinkle colored glitter into both of your hands. Discuss the use of glitter to represent germs. Move around the room touching students, toys, desks, and other objects. Ask students what happened to the glitter that was originally in your hands. Glitter will be transferred to the objects that you touched.

As an alternative activity, older children can portray children and germs in a game of charades. Select one student to portray a child; the others will play the "germs." Germs position themselves around the classroom on surfaces and objects that are shared by all (e.g., tables, chairs, rug or floor, toy bin, bookcase). Germs will try to touch the child as he or she moves through the classroom.

Ask students to identify when they should wash their hands. Display line drawings, photographs, dolls, storyboard or other props to illustrate correct answers. Answers should include washing hands with soap and water *before* eating, *after* sneezing or coughing, *after* playing outdoors, *after* playing with pets, and *after* using the toilet.

Other important habits include using tissues when sneezing or coughing. Demonstrate using a facial tissue when sneezing or coughing. Throw away the used tissue (Soap and Detergent

Association, 1990).

Use classroom or restroom sinks to demonstrate proper behaviors for hand washing. There's more to hand washing than you might think! Instruct students to turn on warm water. Wet hands and then squirt liquid soap into one palm. Scrub hands together for 10-15 seconds, creating lather on the front and back. Rinse hands and dry with a paper towel. Turn off the faucet using the paper towel and throw it away. (Note: students should never share a cloth towel or washcloth as this may spread germs.)

You may reinforce proper hand washing behavior by showing a brief segment from the videotape included in the resource, *Don't Get Sick, Wash Up Quick!* (American Red Cross, 1996). This segment features Scrubby Bear™ and an animated liquid soap dispenser teaching children the steps of hand washing.

Divide students in pairs to practice these important habits. Add fun by singing a song aloud while washing, such as "Ten Little Fingers" to the tune of "Ten Little Indians." Hand washing songs are included in commercial instructional resources, e.g., "Rub-A-Dub" (Soap and Detergent Association, 1990), or "The Handwashing Song" (American Red Cross, 1996).

Make hand washing a part of the daily routine. Sing a song together as children line up to wash before snacks and meals, after playing outside, and after using the toilet. To reinforce students' behaviors, give novelty stickers, or record students' daily performance on a large-format poster in the classroom.

Each student should deliver a letter to parents encouraging

families to practice healthy hand washing at home. Describe the five most important times to wash hands and the steps of proper hand washing in the letter.

As an optional follow-up activity, students will create storybooks using colored construction paper and stencils of common objects (e.g., girl, boy, pet, home, toy, food, sink). Display a model storybook prepared in advance of the lesson. Encourage students to illustrate good personal health habits in their storybooks, for instance washing hands before eating lunch.

Storybook pages can be decorated with stencils, paint, markers or crayons, and colorful stickers. Use wallpaper samples to create colorful and sturdy storybook covers. Staple decorated pages together. Post storybooks on school classroom or hallway bulletin boards to encourage other students to learn more about healthy habits.

Assessment Criteria

Student participation in class discussion, songs, and games related to hand washing behaviors; completion of storybook and activity sheets; direct observation of students as they practice washing hands and classroom record.

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